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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of
Radek Grzeszczuk et al.
Application No. 10/028,414
Filed: December 21, 2001
Attorney Docket No.: 42390.P13155
Title: SURFACE LIGHT FIELD
DECOMPOSITION USING NON-
NEGATIVE FACTORIZATION

DECISION ON RENEWED
PETITION UNDER 37 C.F.R. §1.137(A)

This is a decision on the renewed petition filed March 12, 2004, under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a)¹, to revive the above-identified application.

The above-identified application became abandoned for failure to reply in a timely manner to the Notice of Missing Parts (notice²), mailed January 28, 2002, which set a shortened statutory period for reply of two (2) months. No response was received, and no extensions of time under the provisions of 37 C.F.R. §1.136(a) were requested. Accordingly, the above-identified application became abandoned on March 29, 2002. A Notice of Abandonment was mailed on November 24, 2003.

¹ A grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(a) must be accompanied by:

- (1) The reply required to the outstanding Office action or notice, unless previously filed;
- (2) The petition fee as set forth in § 1.17(l);
- (3) A showing to the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition was unavoidable;
- (4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in § 1.20(d)) required pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section.

² The notice required an executed oath or declaration, along with the surcharge associated with the late filing of an oath or declaration and substitute drawings.

With the original petition, received January 20, 2004, Petitioner supplied a declaration, along with a statement of facts which asserts that the notice was never received, along with a copy of the "docket" in order to show that the correspondence was not received.

On February 25, 2004, the original petition was dismissed via the mailing of a decision which set forth that the original petition lacked item (3) above.

As to item (3), the showing of record is not sufficient to establish to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 37 CFR 1.137(a).

The Commissioner is responsible for determining the standard for unavoidable delay and for applying that standard.

"In the specialized field of patent law, . . . the Commissioner of Patent and Trademarks is primarily responsible for the application and enforcement of the various narrow and technical statutory and regulatory provisions. The Commissioner's interpretation of those provisions is entitled to considerable deference."³

"[T]he Commissioner's discretion cannot remain wholly uncontrolled, if the facts **clearly** demonstrate that the applicant's delay in prosecuting the application was unavoidable, and that the Commissioner's adverse determination lacked **any** basis in reason or common sense."⁴

"The court's review of a Commissioner's decision is 'limited, however, to a determination of whether the agency finding was arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with the law.'"⁵

"The scope of review under the arbitrary and capricious standard is narrow and a court is not to substitute its judgment for that of the agency."⁶

The standard

"[T]he question of whether an applicant's delay in prosecuting an application was unavoidable must be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking all of the facts and circumstances into account."⁷

³ Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F.Supp. 900, 904, 16 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), *aff'd* without opinion (Rule 36), 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir.1991) (citing Morganroth v. Quigg, 885 F.2d 843, 848, 12 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1125 (Fed. Cir. 1989); Ethicon, Inc. v. Quigg 849 F.2d 1422, 7 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1152 (Fed. Cir. 1988) ("an agency's interpretation of a statute it administers is entitled to deference"); *see also* Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defence Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 844, 81 L. Ed. 694, 104 S. Ct. 2778 (1984) ("if the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to the specific issue, the question for the court is whether the agency's answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute.")

⁴ Commissariat A L'Energie Atomique et al. v. Watson, 274 F.2d 594, 597, 124 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 126 (D.C. Cir. 1960) (emphasis added).

⁵ Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316, 5 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1130 (N.D. Ind. 1987) (citing Camp v. Pitts, 411 U.S. 138, 93 S. Ct.1241, 1244 (1973) (citing 5 U.S.C. 706 (2)(A)); Beerly v. Dept. of Treasury, 768 F.2d 942, 945 (7th Cir. 1985); Smith v. Mossinghoff, 217 U.S. App. D.C. 27, 671 F.2d 533, 538 (D.C. Cir.1982)).

⁶ Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608, 34 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1786 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (citing Motor Vehicles Mfrs. Ass'n v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 463 U.S. 29, 43, 77 L.Ed.2d 443, 103 S. Ct. 2856 (1983)).

⁷ Id.

The general question asked by the Office is: "Did petitioner act as a reasonable and prudent person in relation to his most important business?"⁸

Nonawareness of a PTO rule will not constitute unavoidable delay.⁹ The burden of showing the cause of the delay is on the person seeking to revive the application.¹⁰

A delay caused by an applicant's lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice, or the MPEP is not rendered "unavoidable" due to either the applicant's reliance upon oral advice from USPTO employees or the USPTO's failure to advise the applicant to take corrective action.¹¹

The portion of the MPEP relevant to the abandonment of this application

MPEP 711.03(c) states, in part:

PETITION TO WITHDRAW HOLDING OF ABANDONMENT BASED ON FAILURE TO RECEIVE OFFICE ACTION

In *Delgar v. Schulyer*, 172 USPQ 513 (D.D.C. 1971), the court decided that the Office should mail a new Notice of Allowance in view of the evidence presented in support of the contention that the applicant's representative did not receive the original Notice of Allowance. Under the reasoning of *Delgar*, an allegation that an Office action was never received may be considered in a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment. If adequately supported, the Office may grant the petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment and remail the Office action. That is, the reasoning of *Delgar* is applicable regardless of whether an application is held abandoned for failure to timely pay the issue fee (35 U.S.C. 151) or for failure to prosecute (35 U.S.C. 133).

To minimize costs and burdens to practitioners and the Office, the Office has modified the showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office action. The showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office communication must include a statement from the practitioner stating that the Office communication was not received by the practitioner and attesting to the fact that a search of the file jacket and docket records indicates that the Office communication was not received. A copy of the docket record where the nonreceived Office communication would have been entered had it been received and docketed must be attached to and referenced in practitioner's statement. For example, if a three month period for reply was set in the nonreceived Office action, a copy of the docket report showing all replies docketed for a date three months from the mail date of the nonreceived Office action must be submitted as documentary proof of nonreceipt of the Office action. See Notice entitled "Withdrawing the Holding of Abandonment When Office Actions Are Not Received," 1156 O.G. 53 (November 16, 1993).

The showing outlined above may not be sufficient if there are circumstances that point to a conclusion that the Office action may have been lost after receipt rather than a conclusion that the Office action was lost in the mail (e.g., if the practitioner has a history of not receiving Office actions).

Evidence of nonreceipt of an Office communication or action (e.g., Notice of Abandonment or an advisory action) other than that action to which reply was required to avoid abandonment would not warrant withdrawal of the holding of abandonment. Abandonment takes place by operation of law for failure to reply to an Office action or timely pay the issue fee, not by operation of the mailing of a Notice of Abandonment. See *Lorenz v. Finkl*, 333 F.2d 885, 889-90, 142 USPQ 26, 29-30 (CCPA 1964); *Krahn v. Commissioner*, 15 USPQ2d 1823, 1824 (E.D. Va 1990); *In re Application of Fischer*, 6 USPQ2d 1573, 1574 (Comm'r Pat. 1988).

⁸ See *In re Mattulah*, 38 App. D.C. 497 (D.C. Cir. 1912).

⁹ See *Smith v. Mossinghoff*, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (Fed. Cir. 1982) (citing *Potter v. Dann*, 201 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 574 (D.D.C. 1978) for the proposition that counsel's nonawareness of PTO rules does not constitute "unavoidable" delay)). Although court decisions have only addressed the issue of lack of knowledge of an attorney, there is no reason to expect a different result due to lack of knowledge on the part of a pro se (one who prosecutes on his own) applicant. It would be inequitable for a court to determine that a client who spends his hard earned money on an attorney who happens not to know a specific rule should be held to a higher standard than a pro se applicant who makes (or is forced to make) the decision to file the application without the assistance of counsel.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ See *In re Sivertz*, 227 USPQ 255, 256 (Comm'r Pat. 1985).

Two additional procedures are available for reviving an application that has become abandoned due to a failure to reply to an Office Action: (1) a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) based upon unavoidable delay; and (2) a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) based on unintentional delay.

Application of the standard to the current facts and circumstances

In the decision on the original petition, the following was set forth:

In the instant petition, petitioner maintains that the circumstances that led to the abandonment of the application meet the aforementioned unavoidable standard and, therefore, petitioner qualifies for relief under 37 CFR 1.137(a). Petitioner explains that all incoming mail is sorted by the docketing department, and then routed to the attorney responsible for the file.

The printout petitioner has supplied fails to establish non-receipt of an Office communication, in that it has not been accompanied by an attestation to the fact that a search of the file, the file jacket and docket records indicates that the Office communication was not received.

Furthermore, no copy of the file jacket has been supplied.

Additionally, the printouts do not serve as a copy of the docket record where the non-received Office communication would have been entered had it been received and docketed. The printouts supplied all pertain to a particular client, client number "42390," the Intel Corporation. A docket report is a mail log, recorded by the person who receives all incoming mail. A docket report should show all incoming mail received during the relevant time period. As the printout merely concerns the files of a particular client, it fails to show the correspondence at issue was not received and merely misplaced and filed with another file or mislabeled so as to be associated with the wrong client.

On the facts presented, this situation fails to constitute unavoidable delay. These facts might constitute an unintentional delay in prosecution, but it certainly does not rise to the level of unavoidable.

Therefore, it is determined that the petitioner cannot establish that the entire delay in filing the required reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR §1.137(a) was unavoidable which is required in order for relief to be granted under 37 CFR §1.137(a).

The decision concluded with the following recommendation:

On renewed petition, Petitioner may wish to consider supplying a copy of the file jacket, conducting the required searches and stating that they were not successful, and submitting an acceptable docket report.

With the renewed petition, the Petitioner has failed to address any of the reasons which necessitated the dismissal of the decision of February 25, 2004¹². Petitioner has merely set forth a timeline of the events from the abandonment of the application to the drafting of his renewed petition. No new evidence has been submitted: no arguments have been proffered, no searches have been conducted, and no documentation has been supplied.

It follows that the renewed petition must be **DISMISSED**.

¹² For more than a century, punctuality and due diligence, equally with good faith, have been deemed essential requisites to the success of those who seek to obtain the special privileges of the patent law, and they are demanded in the interest of the public and for the protection of rival inventors. See: Porter v. Loudon, 7 App.D.C. 64 (C.A.D.C. 1895), citing Wollensak v. Sargent, 151 U.S. 221, 228, 38 L. Ed. 137, 14 S. Ct. 291 (1894). An invention benefits no one unless it is made public, and the rule of diligence should be so applied as to encourage reasonable promptness in conferring this benefit upon the public. Automatic Electric Co. v. Dyson, 52 App. D.C. 82; 281 F. 586 (C.A.D.C. 1922). Generally, 35 U.S.C. §6; 37 C.F.R. §§1.181, 182, 183.

Furthermore, Petitioner concludes his renewed petition with the following:

The undersigned, in conjunction with in-house counsel, are believed to have acted as reasonable and prudent persons would in relation to their most important business in gathering the required documents and responding to the original Notice of Abandonment and to the Decision on Petition.

On second renewed petition, Petitioner will need to explain why a reasonable person acting in relation to his most important business would read a decision which set forth that a docket report, a statement of a search, and a copy of the file jacket would be required - and include none of these in his response.

Petitioner will also need to explain why the failure to address any of the three points of dismissal does not constitute an intentional delay of the presentation of a grantable petition, which would constitute an absolute bar to revival. As the response fails to mention any search, or any attachment which might include a copy of the file jacket or a docket report, it does not appear that these items were included and subsequently misplaced by the Office.

Any request for reconsideration or petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) must be submitted within **TWO (2) MONTHS** from the mail date of this decision. Extension of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The response should include a cover letter entitled "Second Renewed Petition Under 37 CFR 1.137(a) (or §1.137(b), if applicable)". This is not a final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C 704.

As stated above, on second renewed petition, Petitioner may wish to consider supplying a copy of the file jacket, conducting the required searches and stating that they were not successful, and submitting an acceptable docket report.

Petitioner may also wish to consider filing a petition to revive based on unintentional abandonment under 37 CFR 1.137(b)¹³.

The reply to this letter may be submitted by mail¹⁴, hand-delivery¹⁵, or facsimile¹⁶.

The reply should display "Please deliver to Paul Shanowski, c/o Office of Petitions" in a prominent manner. The Petitioner may wish to consider telephoning the undersigned at the number provided below to confirm that the documents were delivered to the undersigned. Please note that the delivery process within the PTO can take as much as three weeks.

The application file will be retained in the Office of Petitions for two (2) months.

¹³ A grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by:

- (1) The reply required to the outstanding Office action or notice, unless previously filed;
- (2) The petition fee as set forth in § 1.17(m);
- (3) A statement that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph was unintentional. The Commissioner may require additional information where there is a question whether the delay was unintentional, and;
- (4) Any terminal disclaimer (and fee as set forth in § 1.20(d)) required pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section.

¹⁴ Mail Stop Petition, Commissioner for Patents, United States Patent and Trademark Office, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA, 22313-1450.

¹⁵ Customer Window, Mail Stop Petition, Crystal Plaza Two, Lobby, Room 1B03, Arlington, Virginia 22202.

¹⁶ (703) 872-9306 - please note this is a central facsimile number, and as such, there will be a delay in the delivery of the facsimile to the undersigned.

Telephone inquiries regarding *this decision* should be directed to the undersigned at (703) 305-0011.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Shanowski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Paul Shanowski
Attorney
Office of Petitions
United States Patent and Trademark Office